

Statement on Samuel A. Adams

In testimony before the House Select Committee and elsewhere, former CIA employee Samuel A. Adams has charged that:

- The CIA conspired in some unspecified way with the Department of Defense to produce false and misleading, but politically acceptable, estimates of Vietnamese Communist strength.
- The Viet Cong Tet Offensive in 1968 caught the American Intelligence Community largely by surprise. He claims, ". . . the Tet surprise stemmed in large measure from corruption in the intelligence process."

The CIA denies these charges and believes that an examination of its performance during the Vietnam war will not substantiate them. The record shows clearly that Mr. Adams' views on the size and nature of the various organized Communist groups in South Vietnam were in fact supported by CIA. The record also

December 1975

shows that his comments on the extent to which the Intelligence Community was caught by surprise by the Tet Offensive in January 1968, and the conclusions he draws therefrom, are wrong.

In considering the question of Agency support for Mr. Adams' views, several points should be kept in mind. The Agency's general endorsement of the Adams case was not unqualified. Few, if any, in the Agency believed that Mr. Adams' estimates could be accorded such a high degree of precision as to preclude honest differences regarding their accuracy and the methodologies used to derive them. Even to this date, there is considerable uncertainty about the exact numerical strength of the various Communist groups during any of the war years.

The endorsement of the Adams case also did not mean that the Agency shared fully his interpretation of the significance of the numbers. In his testimony before the House Select Committee and in other public statements on the subject, Mr. Adams frequently refers simplistically to an enemy army of 600,000. This formulation masks the substantial qualitative differences between full-time,

well-armed and well-trained combat forces on the one hand and poorly armed and poorly trained irregular forces and unarmed political cadre on the other. Lumping all of these disparate types together and failing to differentiate between a "combat threat" and the broader "insurgency threat" represented by all organized political, military, and quasi-military groups was as unacceptable to most observers in the CIA as it was to those in military intelligence.

Under the first charge Mr. Adams asserts that the CIA did not give him adequate support in defending his independent estimates of the size of the enemy forces in South Vietnam. Even though the primary responsibility for research and analysis of the Vietnamese Communist order of battle belonged to the Department of Defense and its field commands, the record shows clearly that Mr. Adams was given an unprecedented degree of Agency support for his position.

By his own recounting, Mr. Adams had unparalleled opportunities to present his views. They were given full consideration by the senior line officers in the Agency responsible for intelligence on the Vietnam war. He participated as a member of the CIA delegation to three conferences on the Vietnamese

Communist order of battle. Mr. Adams also had a major role in the drafting of CIA position papers for these conferences and in the drafting during 1967 of a Special National Intelligence Estimate on the military capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists.

The record also demonstrates clearly that the most senior officials of the U. S. Government were alerted by CIA to the nature of the differences in estimates of Communist manpower. On several occasions the Agency provided to these officials its own independent estimates which reflected much of Mr. Adams' research and were significantly higher than those of the intelligence components of the Department of Defense. Some of these documents, or extracts from them, are attached as annexes to this statement.

As Mr. Adams has testified, his initial questioning of the correctness of official estimates of the size of enemy forces was made in August 1966. This was done in a draft report, "The Strength of the Viet Cong Irregulars," dated 22 August 1966. On 26 August the CIA, in a special assessment prepared for the Secretary of Defense and also disseminated to the President, the Secretary of State, and other senior officials, advised:

"Recently acquired documentary evidence now being studied in detail suggests that our holdings on the numerical strength of these irregulars (now being carried at around 110,000) may require drastic upward revision."

In January 1967 CIA's Board of National Estimates prepared a special memorandum on the Vietnam war which was disseminated to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and other senior officials. This memorandum states:

"For some years it has been estimated that there were about 100,000-120,000 irregulars, but there is now documentary evidence which strongly suggests that at the beginning of 1965 irregular strength was about 200,000 and that the goal for the end of 1965 was 250,000-300,000. More recent documentary evidence suggests that this goal was probably reached, at least during 1966."

Clearly, these and other assessments show that the CIA did not shrink from pushing the case for higher figures and made no attempt to produce "politically acceptable" estimates. From

August 1966, until the agreement reached at the Order of Battle Conference in Saigon in September 1967, papers produced by the Agency giving its independent assessment consistently carried the higher strength figures.

#### The Order of Battle Issue

The debates within the Intelligence Community about the strength of Communist forces centered on two questions--the quantification of the various organized groups of Communist manpower, and the determination of which of these groups should be included in the official order of battle.

The complexity of the issue is reflected in Mr. Adams' own estimates throughout the period. In December 1966, by his own recounting, he estimated the size of enemy forces at 600,000 or more than twice that of the official military estimates. After a study trip to Vietnam in May of 1967, Mr. Adams revised his estimates downward to a total of 500,000. This figure of 500,000 was used in the initial CIA draft of a Special National Intelligence Estimate prepared in the spring and summer of 1967.

During the process of coordinating this draft estimate, the figures were revised slightly and by August of 1967 the draft

estimate showed a total figure for enemy manpower of 431,000 to 491,000. Mr. Adams played a major role in the refinement of these figures which were used by the Washington delegation to the order of battle conference held in Saigon in September 1967.

Mr. Adams was a member of that delegation and argued for the figures in the discussions with MACV. As shown in the attached table, the Washington figure of 431,000 to 491,000 compared with a MACV figure of 298,000.

It will be seen from the table that the two most contentious categories were Administrative Services (support) troops and the category of the Irregular Forces. In each instance, neither party to the conference was able to convince the other of the validity of its case.

Regarding the Administrative Services category, it was agreed that the quantification--35,000 to 40,000--required textual qualification in the estimate. The final draft of the SNIE acknowledged explicitly that we lacked confidence in the total size of this category at any given time, but that it was "at least 35,000 to 40,000". In addition the SNIE pointed out that almost anyone under VC control could be impressed into service to perform the administrative service functions.

The conference was unable to reach agreement on the size of the Irregular Forces. MACV argued that these forces should not be included in a military order of battle and that in any event there was not sufficient knowledge to quantify them. The Washington delegation agreed that the Irregular Forces were so poorly armed and sketchily trained that they did not constitute an integral part of the conventional combat threat. The Washington team nevertheless insisted that Irregular Forces should be included in any national intelligence assessments of overall enemy capabilities, both political and military.

The conference agreement not to quantify the Irregular Forces also reflected the general acknowledgment that our information on these forces was such that we could not estimate their size with sufficient confidence. Mr. Adams did not agree with this. The SNIE made it clear, however, that these Irregular Forces were a substantial factor in Vietnam. The SNIE stated that in early 1966 the size of the Irregulars could have been on the order of 150,000 persons. Although allowing for some attrition, the language of the estimate made it clear that they still constituted a substantial element in the Communist effort.



In regard to the other categories, particularly those making up the VC/NVA military force, it should be noted that the final figures agreed at the conference and those used in the final draft of the SNIE were well within the range of the figures used to establish the position of the Washington community on this question. Moreover, the agreed figures for these categories also show an acceptance by MACV of a range significantly higher than the estimate it had submitted at the conference.

Thus, the agreements reached at Saigon were far from the cover-up or sell-out claimed by Mr. Adams. The results of the conference did not endorse the initial position of any party. They reflected the lack of definitive data, different methodologies, and differing concepts as to the types of organized groups and how they should be presented in the SNIE. In any event the different views were fully aired and were made widely known to all concerned with developments in Indochina.

The Saigon conference did demonstrate the need for better data and for more persuasive analysis by the various components of the Intelligence Community if differences between Washington and

MACV were to be narrowed. An added impetus to the need for more research on Vietnamese Communist manpower was the growing interest in Washington in measuring the impact on enemy capabilities of extremely high rates of attrition. The debate about numbers and their accuracy was being overshadowed by a much more critical national intelligence question. Did the Vietnamese Communists have adequate manpower resources to replace their combat losses and to maintain a viable military force?

In August 1967 CIA established a new branch to concentrate more resources on this problem. In addition to mounting a more intensive research program on broader manpower questions such as recruitment, infiltration, deserters and defectors, the CIA now became directly involved in independent order of battle research and analysis. Before this time, order of battle analysis was the primary responsibility of military intelligence. Among the analysts assigned to the task was Mr. Adams who, with his colleagues, produced within a few months a new series of estimates as the basis for another order of battle conference called at CIA

initiative and held in Washington in April 1968. This conference also failed to achieve agreement between Washington and Saigon for many of the same reasons which prevented agreement during the conference held in September 1967. The conference did, however, narrow the differences between the CIA and the military numbers.

Even though CIA was unable to obtain military acceptance of its estimates of organized Communist forces in South Vietnam, CIA did not attempt to mask the fact that there were differences or to keep from the policymakers an understanding of the magnitude and nature of the differences. The CIA continued to make its case for higher figures. A CIA assessment prepared for Secretary of Defense McNamara in December 1967, for example, used the numbers agreed at the order of battle conference held in Saigon, but also expressed our concern that the numbers were too low and did not include other sizeable components in the Communist force structure. Moreover, in February 1968 a joint CIA/Joint Staff/DIA memorandum used the independent CIA estimates for the size of the Communist manpower base in South Vietnam. This

estimate--500,000--was compatible with the views of Mr. Adams. The memorandum was transmitted to the Secretary of Defense by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

### The Tet Surprise

In making his charges regarding the surprise of the Washington community at the time of the Tet Offensive, Mr. Adams states that this surprise stemmed from corruption in the intelligence process. He also stated that both his belief and the evidence would show ". . . that American intelligence had so denigrated the Viet Cong's capabilities that we simply could not have predicted the size of the Tet attack".

The question of the performance of the Intelligence Community in providing warning of the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam in January 1968 was the subject of intensive investigations within the Intelligence Community. The report resulting from these investigations has been made available to the House Select Committee.

In 1968, shortly after the Tet Offensive, at the request of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, CIA Director Helms appointed a working group chaired by his Deputy Director for Intelligence and including representatives from CIA, DIA, INR, NSA, and the Joint Staff. This group examined the raw intelligence information received and the intelligence summaries and judgments reported on in the period immediately prior to the Tet Offensive and also visited Vietnam to be joined there by observers from CINCPAC, MACV, and the CIA Station in Saigon.

The working group found that the Intelligence Community--both in Washington and in Saigon--had reported that the enemy was preparing for a series of coordinated attacks probably on a larger scale than ever before. The final results of this group's investigations acknowledged that warning of the Tet Offensive had not fully anticipated the intensity, coordination, and timing of the enemy attack.

On the question of timing, the working group found that both the analysts in Washington and the field commanders in Saigon believed that the enemy would most probably attack just before or just after the Tet holiday. Nevertheless, the clear warnings regarding the imminence of an offensive--whether it would occur just

before, just after, or during Tet--were sufficient for the military command in Saigon to take alerting measures throughout Vietnam. Although these measures varied in effectiveness from area to area and among units, they were sufficient to reduce considerably the impact of the enemy offensive.

If the Intelligence Community's performance in warning of the offensive was as dismal as Mr. Adams maintains, the loss of American lives and military equipment would have been significantly greater than actually occurred. Moreover, the fact that intelligence provided this warning was not an insignificant factor in the failure of the Vietnamese Communists to attain their goal of a general uprising that would result in a decisive victory in the shortest possible time.

In Mr. Adams' view the Intelligence Community did not provide ample warning of the Tet Offensive simply because its estimates of enemy manpower were so low that they led the community to misjudge the Viet Cong's capability to mount such widespread attacks. This argument is largely spurious. Throughout the Intelligence Community and at the highest policymaking circles of this Government, there was an awareness of substantial differences in estimates of enemy strength in South Vietnam and there was also

an awareness that the CIA estimates of the total enemy threat were considerably higher than those maintained by MACV. Even if the only estimates of enemy strength were those of MACV--the lowest available--they were well within the numbers required for the Viet Cong to mount the Tet Offensive. Studies made after the Tet Offensive both by CIA and other members of the Intelligence Community showed that the Communists committed some 75,000 to 85,000 of their military forces in the Tet Offensive. The capability to commit this many troops was well within existing estimates. This was true whether one's perception of the strength of the VC/NVA military force was based on the lower figures held by MACV or the higher figures held by CIA. There was also a universal consensus that, whatever their number, the attacking enemy units were almost without exception those of the VC/NVA regular military forces. The role of the Irregular Forces--the main component accounting for Mr. Adams' larger estimates--was seen to be marginal.

### Analytical Effort on the Vietnam War

In addition to the broad allegations discussed above, Mr. Adams' testimony gives a distorted impression of the scope of the analytical effort on the Vietnam war. In addition to claiming that he was the Agency's principal analyst on the Viet Cong, he makes a further assertion that for two years he was the only analyst working full time on the problem.

Mr. Adams' testimony on this point reflects a surprisingly dim awareness of his own relative position in CIA and of the broad range of Vietnam-war related activities on which CIA was conducting research and analysis.

In CIA, two components of the Directorate of Intelligence--the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) and the Office of Economic Research (OER)--shared the primary responsibilities for producing intelligence on the Vietnam war. During the years 1965-1968 when Mr. Adams was most directly engaged in making his case for higher figures, the number of personnel in these offices working full time on the Vietnamese war grew from 15 analysts in 1965 to 69 analysts in 1968. In addition CIA's Office of National Estimates had a small staff



responsible for integrating Community inputs into National Intelligence Estimates or special assessments related to the Vietnam war. The DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs also maintained a large staff responsible for coordinating the Agency's analytical and operational activities associated with the war.

Numbers aside, Mr. Adams' testimony might have been more accurate if he had stated that he was the only person in CIA working essentially full time on the exploitation of captured documents specifically for information on the size and structure of Vietnamese Communist military organizations. As noted before, the Department of Defense and its field commands had the primary responsibility for estimates of these military intelligence matters.

At the same time Mr. Adams was exploiting these documents for his narrowly defined purposes, they were also studied and analyzed by the dozens of analysts reporting on a wide range of activities. These included political and military developments throughout Indochina; detailed studies of the Communists' logistic and personnel infiltration systems; and analyses of the effects of the

bombing; reporting and analysis of Vietnamese manpower resources; and a variety of topics related to domestic economic, and foreign trade relationships.

In sum, the responsibilities of the intelligence analysts in CIA during the course of the Vietnam war were far-ranging and demanding. In this context, and given the fact that responsibility for detailed order of battle analysis was not that of the CIA, it cannot be viewed as surprising that only one analyst was assigned a related responsibility on a full-time basis. As stated previously, when the question of Vietnamese Communist manpower acquired a truly substantive significance in terms of assessing Vietnamese ability to continue with the war in view of the high loss rates they sustained, the CIA created a special unit of 8 analysts to work on all aspects of Vietnamese manpower, including order of battle.

### The 30,000 Agents

Mr. Adams makes several references in his testimony before the House Select Committee to his role in 1970 in producing a CIA memorandum reporting that the Viet Cong had 30,000 agents in the South Vietnamese Government and Army. His testimony gives the impression that Agency work on this subject was almost exclusively an Adams effort, and, further, that the Agency attempted to suppress the report.

Public discussion of the Agency estimate that there were 30,000 Viet Cong agents is not novel. The substance of the initial memorandum reporting these numbers leaked to The New York Times shortly after its publication in 1970. Mr. Adams also discussed this estimate and his role in its production with the press when he resigned from the Agency in 1973. The subject was also treated in the Adams' article published by Harper's magazine in May 1975.

Mr. Adams' discussion of this topic reflects some of the same kinds of deficiencies apparent in his recounting of his role in estimating enemy strengths. The most notable of these are his tendency to claim almost exclusive personal credit and his penchant for reaching highly simplistic judgments and conclusions.

Mr. Adams was not as he claims " . . . the first person ever to attempt to count spies or even to estimate the size of the problem". The effort to publish finished intelligence on this subject was admittedly modest but consistent with the availability of the data to be exploited. The question of Communist subversion was of more concern in the operational components of the Agency. During the 1969-1970 period the CIA Station in Saigon had 14 personnel assigned to counterintelligence activities. This field effort was backstopped by a five-person team in CIA Headquarters who spent full time providing analytical and other support to Saigon Station's Counterintelligence Program.

In describing the 30,000 agents as " . . . the biggest espionage network in the history of mankind," Mr. Adams again shows his tendency to make sweeping generalizations. In the official Agency publications regarding these estimates, for example, the text makes it quite clear that the total number must be viewed only as a broad order of magnitude. The basic question was, "What is an agent?" Most of the people included in the Adams estimate were not highly trained and dedicated agents. In a country torn

apart for years by revolution and war, it was inevitable that divided loyalties would result from divergent nationalistic, ideological and familial factors. Thus, the bulk of the 30,000 agents were in fact "fence-sitters" or people with varying degrees of sympathy for the Communist cause. By Mr. Adams' own analysis, the number of hard core agents amounted to some 10 percent of his estimate.

Mr. Adams testifies that he had to go outside channels to get a draft of this estimate to consumers in the White House. Mr. Adams fails to report that 18 months transpired from his initiation of the report to its completion. This time was required for the completion of several drafts in an attempt to get a product from Mr. Adams that would meet minimum Agency standards regarding not only the organization of reports and the quality of the writing in them, but more importantly the consistency and soundness of the analysis and the evidence for making the judgments presented in the report.

The Collapse of South Vietnam

Admitting that he was testifying only from hearsay, Mr. Adams, nevertheless, probably gave the House Select Committee the impression that the collapse of the South Vietnamese government in 1975 took the Intelligence Community by surprise.

If this impression were left with the Committee, it needs to be corrected. A thorough review of U. S. intelligence analysis in the six months preceding the collapse of the Saigon government shows that it acquitted itself very well.

In terms of its primary predictive responsibility-- the intentions and capabilities of the North Vietnamese-- American intelligence made a continuous, voluminous and high quality input to U. S. policymakers. The Intelligence Community correctly estimated that Communist forces in South Vietnam were more powerful than ever before and predicted a marked increase in military action in the first half of 1975. The Intelligence Community also predicted

correctly that Hanoi was not planning an all-out offensive for the first half of 1975, but would be quick to go on the offensive if a major opportunity arose. The validity of this last assessment has since been confirmed by statements of North Vietnamese leaders.

The Intelligence Community could not perceive that the major opportunity would be the hasty, ill-planned, and poorly executed decision made by President Thieu on 13 March 1975 to withdraw his forces from large parts of South Vietnam. But once this decision was made, the Intelligence Community was quick to grasp the consequences of its faulty implementation. On 17 March, the Community predicted Hanoi's likely moves to exploit South Vietnam's new vulnerability and clearly identified the factors which could lead to South Vietnam's unraveling. The Community's first authoritative judgment that Saigon's collapse was both inevitable and imminent was made by 3 April 1975.

**The 1967 Saigon Order of Battle Conference****Estimated Strength of Communist Forces in South Vietnam**

<u>Category</u>	<u>August Draft SNIE 14. 3/67</u>	<u>MACV</u>	<u>Conference Agreement</u>	<u>Final SNIE 14. 3/67</u>
<b><u>VC/NVA Military Force</u></b>				
Main and Local Forces	121,000	119,000	119,000	118,000
Administrative Services (Support)	40 - 60,000	29,000	35 - 40,000*	35 - 40,000*
Guerrillas	60 - 100,000	65,000	70 - 90,000	70 - 90,000
<u>Sub-Total</u>	221 - 281,000	213,000	224 - 249,000	223 - 248,000
<b><u>Other Organizations</u></b>				
Political Cadre	90,000	85,000	75 - 85,000	75 - 85,000
Irregulars (Self-Defense Forces ) (Secret Self-Defense Forces) (Assault Youth )	120,000	---	No Quantification *	No Quantification *
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>431,000 - 491,000</b>	<b>298,000</b>	<b>299,000 - 334,000</b>	<b>298,000 - 333,000</b>

\* To be qualified in the text of SNIE 14. 3/67